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Article published May 18, 2001

Shirley Levy

Low Lake Erie water levels won't stop recreational boats

Spring rains aren't expected to provide much relief from the low water levels that have caused problems for boaters and marinas during the last year.



Shirley Levy

According to forecasts issued by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Lake Erie's summer peak in June could be as much as 8-10 inches below last year's peak.

But despite the challenging conditions, planning for the 2001 season is pretty much on schedule and the boating community can look forward to the usual full calendar of races, cruises and get-togethers.

Major events will include the Great Lakes Lightning Championships at North Cape Yacht Club, May 26-27; Jolly Roger Sailing Club's Cattail Regatta, June 2-3; Detroit's National Offshore One-Design Regatta at Bayview Yacht Club, June 3; Lake Erie Race Week, June 22-27, at various clubs; Bayview's Port Huron-to-Mackinac Race, July 21; the Inter-Lake Yachting Association Sail Regatta at Put-in-Bay, Aug. 6-8, followed by the Powerboat Regatta, Aug. 9-11; Monroe Boat Club's Race to the Sisters, Aug. 18, and the Trans-Erie Race from Grosse Ile Yacht Club to Erie (Pa) Yacht Club, Aug. 24-26.

To encourage some fresh faces, the ILYA Regatta will introduce several events for cruising boats including some short, casual races around the islands and temporary membership at the Crew's Nest restaurant and recreational facility.

At ILYA's December meeting in Toledo, the organization presented the prestigious Blue Gavel Trophy for the Performance Handicap Racing Fleet boat of the year to Red Cloud, owned by John Greiner of North Cape Yacht Club.

The Santana 35 also was honored as boat of the year by the Associated Yacht Clubs.

Greiner bought the boat, a two-time Mackinac Race winner, last <\$eb>year after skipping her for a friend in 12 Mackinacs. Her strong showing, including the overall championship at the 2000 Toledo Race Week, was paced by first overall finishes in three of the five races in the series.

Red Cloud captured the PHRF overall honors at both Bay Week and Jolly Roger's Fall Series and also won its class in 10 of 14 races in North Cape's midweek series.

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Greiner, a former small boat sailor, said "Thistle know-how" helped him ride the big waves in the rougher races.

The 64-year-old skipper will sail his 25th Mackinac this summer, making him eligible to join Bayview's Old Goats Society, an elite group of sailors who have raced in 25 Macs.

Bayview is still trying to finalize plans for a 2001 Canada's Cup, according to spokeswoman Kerrie Barno. The match-race series is tentatively scheduled Sept. 7-14, in Farr 40s.

The Royal Canadian Yacht Club extended a challenge last year, and the event originally was planned for last fall, but some details still need to be worked out, Barno said.

The 30-foot Champion Eagle, skippered by Ken Meade, won the Cup for Bayview in 1994.

No matter how the Cup races turn out, Detroit will provide plenty of thrills for boaters this summer. The city will celebrate its tricentennial during the Detroit Festival in July with a parade of historic ships highlighting its maritime history.

The city is one of eight Great Lakes ports to be visited by the Tall Ships Challenge 2001. At least 20 schooners, brigs and other classic ships will get under way at Oswego, N.Y., on Lake Ontario, June 21. Other stops are expected to include Toronto, Cleveland, Milwaukee, Chicago, Bay City, Muskegon and Port Colbourne, Ont.

Big plans also are in the wind for Toledo's downtown riverfront. The Toledo Rowing Club's annual International Rowing Regatta, scheduled on the Maumee River in May for the past 16 years, will switch to a fall date and a new concept this year.

The new event will be a three-mile Head Race on the Maumee River, Oct. 13.

TRC's new president, Jeff Helmick, cited two reasons for the change.

"First, every official who ever came to town for our spring regatta said that, because of the bridges and the dogleg, it wasn't the best course for a sprint race," he said.

"Also, we got wind that the Midwest Junior Rowing Association Championships in Cincinnati were going to be scheduled on our traditional date and we were already hitting the end of the high school and college sprint season."

Instead of racing one-on-one with other boats in its class, a competitor in a head race rows against the clock. Each boat moves through a chute and its starting time is recorded. Scoring is based on its elapsed time to the finish.

"A head race keeps a steady flow of boats on the water," Helmick said, "but it's harder to tell who's winning."

Helmick said the club plans to expand Sum Pro, a summer program that teaches people to row, to provide experience in both sculling and sweep-oar rowing.

The club also wants to revive its central-city girls rowing program. The program was introduced last summer, but fell apart at the end of the season.

"Keeping teenage women interested in rowing was a big challenge once school started," Helmick said.

Shirley Levy is a Blade columnist.



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